

SOVIET POLICY AND JEWISH FATE

In Russia and in Israel

WALTER Z. LAQUEUR

IT TOOK almost three years after Stalin's death to find out what had happened to the Jews of the Soviet Union during what was almost as fateful a period of Jewish history as that which unfolded under the curse of Hitler. And though the events taking place in Russia between 1950 and 1953 have only an indirect connection with the present hostile Soviet attitude toward Israel, it is nonetheless a significant one. Both in the case of its treatment of the Russian Jews, and of its hostile policy toward Israel, Moscow has been able to pull the wool over the eyes of Jews outside the Communist world; it has moved against Jewish rights and interests with a freedom that it would not have had, and would not today retain vis-à-vis Israel, if Western and Israeli Jewry had protested energetically enough against the first signs of anti-Semitic "opportunism" on the Kremlin's part.

The campaign in the Soviet press several years ago against "cosmopolitans" gave an inkling of what was taking place, but it was only in the autumn of 1953, with the publication of Ilya Ehrenburg's novel *The Thaw* (which has given its name to the present period of Soviet history), that a real glimpse was afforded of what ordinary Soviet citizens of Jewish birth went through during

the last years of Stalin's rule. And in 1954 came the first indications that the "thaw" itself was beginning to affect them. The climate of fear in which Soviet Jews had been living was eased, the ban on Jewish cultural activities relaxed, and from Leningrad to Tashkent occasional "evenings of Jewish song" (or "Jewish humor") were reported. At the same time, a few Soviet Jews, most of them elderly, were permitted to emigrate in order to join their families, in Israel and elsewhere. There were some other signs of a Soviet change of heart as far as Jews were concerned, which were made the most of by the Communist and fellow-traveling press in the world outside. The very fact, however, that so much was made of these signs should have startled more people into a suspicion of the nature of the situation this change of heart was supposed to remedy.

Only in the past year, however, and especially in the seven or eight months since the 20th Congress of the Communist party of the Soviet Union, has enough information emerged to enable us to form a real picture of the situation of Soviet Jewry, past and present. Rabbinical delegations, journalists, and private individuals have visited the Soviet Union, and news and comment have come from diplomatic and political sources. The delegation of French Socialists that visited Russia this past summer had much to report on the plight of the Jews there. And Soviet spokesmen themselves have become less reticent on the subject, though all they have given us so far are bits and pieces of information.

THE picture that has finally emerged is a very somber one, shocking even the most hardened Communists and fellow-travelers

SOVIET anti-Semitism in the past has turned out to be a much larger phenomenon than even anti-Communists feared, and in its light the present Soviet hostility to Israel and friendliness to the Arabs seems to become all the more ominous, as WALTER Z. LAQUEUR suggests in this article. Mr. Laqueur is a regular contributor to these pages, in which he last appeared in August, with "The Oren Case." Born in Germany, he went to Palestine in 1938, but is now on a prolonged stay in England, where he edits *Soviet Culture*, an information series, for the Congress of Cultural Freedom.

and exceeding the wildest fears of anti-Communists. The most rabid of the latter would not have expected Stalin actually to execute the *majority* of Yiddish writers in the USSR (all of whom were good Stalinists, moreover). Since these things have been revealed some Communist leaders in the West have been asking for explanations. But Stalin's heirs, while ready to make certain amends, have refused to make any explanations on this score.

Russian translations of the writings of Perez Markish and Itzik Fefer, two of the executed Yiddish writers, are now appearing in the Soviet Union; a pension has been granted to Markish's widow, and an almanac of Yiddish writing has been announced; next year a Yiddish newspaper may appear and a Jewish theater re-open. But the Soviet authorities still won't say *why* Markish and Fefer were killed—or, for that matter, even permit the fact itself to be mentioned in the press.

Stalin's heirs have been ready to admit that there were sundry "deviations from the norms of democratic procedure" under his rule, and they have denounced the "cult of the individual" (a misnomer if there ever was one), but they have been loath so far to charge Stalin with anti-Semitism. When Hugh Gaitskell, British Labor party leader, asked Khrushchev and Bulganin in London about anti-Semitism in Russia, they blandly denied its existence, professing not to know what he was talking about. (That the French Socialists who visited the USSR likewise raised the question of anti-Semitism may help account for Moscow's recently renewed attacks on the Socialist parties of Western Europe.) On other occasions the Soviet leaders have indeed admitted the existence of anti-Semitism in the USSR in the past, but put all the blame on Beria. The small amount of trustworthy information we possess does not bear them out in this: in 1952, the year of the worst excesses against Jews, the direction of internal security affairs was out of Beria's hands, and upon his return to power in March of 1953 one of his first acts was to release and exonerate the

Jewish (and other) physicians involved in the Moscow "doctors' plot."

I

WE HAVE a pretty good idea of what went on in Russia between 1950 and 1953, and it can be left to historians to document that time of horror in detail. Right now information about the present plight of the Soviet Union's Jews and about the new "collective" leadership's attitude toward them is of greater urgency. It is essential to the fate of these Jews that Jews elsewhere form a correct picture of their situation.

The tendency for years has been to assess Jewish life in the Soviet Union mainly from the point of view of Yiddish culture, on the one hand, and religious freedom on the other. These points of view are valid, but it has been wrong to make them practically the only ones.

The issue as regards Yiddish writing in Russia has been one of principle, not of intrinsic value. To judge from the posthumously published poetry of Fefer and Markish, and translations that have recently appeared in Soviet magazines of the verse and prose of such surviving Yiddish writers as Vergelis and Sternberg, it would be hard to say that their work contributes greatly to world literature or to the Jewish people.* Aside from its rather mediocre quality, the content of that much of it that has been published so far is not Jewish. In fact, this writing is hardly distinguishable from most of the work that has appeared in Russian translation by writers belonging to the less important national minorities of the Soviet Union, or from the effusions of Russian provincial authors. Thus the present state-sponsored revival of Yiddish literature, now

*The posthumous rehabilitation of Isaac Babel [many of whose stories have been published in translation in COMMENTARY—Ed.] is a different matter. Babel wrote in Russian, and he was purged in 1936, long before the Yiddish writers. Among other exceptions is Alexander Isbah, another Jew writing in Russian, who was silenced in the late 40's for treating "Jewish nationalist motives." Isbah is now being published again, but appears to be dealing with different subjects.

that the best Yiddish writers are dead, is largely factitious, and more gesture than reality. The number of people interested in a third-rate Yiddish writing totally devoid of Jewish content must be limited indeed. This is what Soviet spokesmen themselves have been saying for quite some time, and they are probably right. No doubt a freer Yiddish literature that could deal with Jewish subjects would attract more readers. But even so, to judge from the fate of Yiddish literature in the last generation in the United States and elsewhere, it would be wrong to make Communism *totally* responsible for the decline of Yiddish writing in Russia. The fact is that specifically Jewish cultural life seems to be fighting a more or less losing battle almost everywhere nowadays.

Nor has their religion retained its old importance for the majority of Soviet Jews. Rabbi Morris N. Kertzer, director of the American Jewish Committee's Department of Jewish Communal Affairs, who visited Russia this past summer as head of a seven-man delegation from the New York Board of Rabbis, reported in the *New York Times* that he did not see a single Jew under thirty-five praying at the dozen or so synagogue services he attended. And Rabbi George B. Lieberman, the only Russian-speaking member of the same delegation, said: "It soon became obvious to me, when entering the Great Synagogue of Moscow, that I was standing on the threshold of death."

Religion in general continues to be actively discouraged in the USSR, but what is less known is that the different religions are by no means all dealt with in the same way. As the most favored, the Orthodox, or Pravoslav, Church, which was Russia's official church under the Czars, and Islam are given preferential treatment. Judaism and Roman Catholicism receive the opposite.

The reasons for this discrimination are too complicated to go into here, though they are no mystery. The Pravoslav Church, a few Protestant denominations, Islam, and some other creeds are permitted to maintain statewide organizations of congregations, operate seminaries, publish their own peri-

odicals, send delegations abroad, convene all-Soviet meetings, and so forth. Soviet Judaism is allowed none of these things. Perhaps this situation will be eased in the future—a few years ago even rabbinical delegations from abroad would have been unthinkable. But even if the hopes now being held out by the Soviet authorities, as expressed informally by high officials of the Council of Cults to Rabbi David Hollander, leader of the Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America's delegation to the USSR, are all fulfilled, the synagogue in Russia will only receive *some* of the "privileges" that the Pravoslav Church enjoyed even before Stalin died. These will certainly not suffice to keep the Jewish religion alive in Russia outside a small number of pious Jews whom the authorities tolerate because they are considered ineffectual. And it is unrealistic to hope for more far-reaching concessions on this score, since the extinction of Judaism is precisely what Soviet policy intends.

Nor is the responsibility of Communism for the decline of the Jewish faith in Russia attenuated, as its responsibility for the decline of Yiddish culture is, by circumstances beyond state control. Despite the anti-religious tenor of Soviet education, religion in general would in all probability fare no better or worse in Russia than it does in the West today were it not for the many official sanctions and administrative prohibitions which make it highly unwise (to say the least) for any Soviet subject with a career in mind to attend synagogue or church, or show any interest whatsoever in religion.

BUT if most of the Jews of the Soviet Union no longer care for Yiddish or any other specifically Jewish kind of culture, and if most of them have lost interest in religion, why is it that, according to all the evidence, they are more highly "Jewish-conscious" than almost any other Jews in the world today? Talking with Soviet Jews themselves and with observers who spent many years in the USSR, I have found it impossible to get a clear definition of this new "Jewish consciousness," but it can be best described as

a vague feeling of common origin, of somehow belonging together, of sharing certain "relics of the past"—such as a few Hebrew words, a few Jewish tunes—in other words, it is a kind of "collective memory," fragmentary though it be. Yet in the main, the new "Jewish consciousness" of Soviet Jews must be defined as a response, sheerly, to social and—sometimes—political anti-Semitism. Because it lacks positive meaning, it is a tragic response: people feel themselves to belong together without knowing why.

Social anti-Semitism, both from above and below, was palpable under Stalin. Jews were purged, because they were Jews, from the Foreign Service and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, from the upper echelons of the Red Army, of the political police, and of the party machine. There were many other instances in other spheres of Soviet life of discrimination against Jews and, according to reliable evidence, the fundamental situation has changed but little since then. There are still a few highly placed Jews in the USSR: and their names were cited by Mikoyan in answer to a direct question put by members of the delegation of French Socialists. David Reiser has an office in one of the "technical" ministries, and a Jewish colonel general is said to be stationed in Sverdlovsk, or some such place this side of the Urals. Lazar Kaganovich, one of Stalin's side-kicks, and lately appointed head of the building industry, was not mentioned by Mikoyan, either because he is on his way out or because it is thought undesirable to advertise the fact that he is Jewish. There are no apparent restrictions against Jews in such fields as science, technology, and the management of industrial and commercial enterprises, but Jews seem to choose—wisely perhaps—not to hold too prominent positions there, preferring in many cases to be deputies of bosses rather than bosses themselves.

In defending themselves against charges of anti-Semitism, Soviet spokesmen have argued recently, in private conversation, that there were no highly placed Jews in the British government either, or in its Foreign Service; that there were none or hardly any

among France's generals; and that there was an unofficial *numerus clausus* for Jews in American universities. What makes this argument so hollow is that, even apart from the ban on Jewish nationalism and culture, the *average* Jew, according to all the evidence, is exposed to far more social anti-Semitism in the Soviet world than he is in the democratic West. And in any case: since when has the capitalist West been a yardstick by which Communists measure themselves? Or, to put it more correctly, since when has the West furnished an example of the *ideal* which they are satisfied to attain? The discrepancy in the Soviet world between theory—"proletarian internationalism"—and practice is all too blatant here.*

SINCE Lenin's time nothing has embarrassed, and infuriated, the Kremlin more than to have attention called to the divergencies between ideal and reality in the Soviet world. The recent exposures of anti-Semitism in Russia have created a situation that has the character of a test case—especially in view of the fact that the most outrageous of all the outrageous features of Hitler fascism—of which the Soviet Union professes to be the only true antithesis—was precisely its anti-Semitism. Jews have benefited from the recent "thaw," but that "thaw" itself has been a strictly limited one, and Soviet Jews have benefited less by it than most others have.

Nor does the attempt to unload the responsibility for the anti-Semitic campaign of 1950-53 on the corpse of Beria and, by implication, on that of Stalin argue much for the good faith of the present rulers of the USSR. Khrushchev has revealed that Stalin entertained the idea of deporting all the Jews of the Soviet Union to a desert region, but he let this out only after having been

*A standard Communist argument used to be that the USSR was the only country on earth where anti-Semitism was punishable by law. This is true, but not a single case of any one's being prosecuted under this law in the Soviet Union has come to light in the last twenty years. Nor did it deter Stalin from executing the Jewish writers.

himself accused of anti-Semitism. (At a session of the Central Committee of the Polish Communist party in Warsaw last March, he is reported to have said that "you have too many Rosenblums here," and to have argued against naming Roman Zambrowski as Bierut's successor because he was a Jew. Furthermore he, as well as Mrs. Yekaterina A. Furtseva, is reported to have expressed himself in private as favoring a *numerus clausus* for Jews in certain fields of Soviet activity.)

Soviet Jews can now breathe more freely. They are back, or should be—if all the recently proclaimed promises are carried out—where they were in 1946. There is no longer any concerted drive against "cosmopolitans"; Jewish writers are no longer being shot; and though people may still get up to five years in jail for having Hebrew newspapers in their possession (the last such case was reported in March of 1956), no new show trials involving Jews are in preparation. The leadership of the Russian Communist party still reveals anti-Semitic feeling now and then, but this is not inspired from above. Compared with 1952, the present state of affairs might almost be called idyllic.

Nonetheless, the basic causes that still give Soviet Jews reason to fear for themselves have not disappeared. Just as a recurrence of "Stalinism" continues to be a possibility as long as no fundamental changes are made in the structure of the Soviet regime, so a recurrence of rabid anti-Semitism remains possible—particularly should the international situation deteriorate. Nor has de-Stalinization changed Soviet dogma on the "Jewish question." The Jews are still supposed to renounce all their ethnic, cultural, and religious ties and traditions, and assimilate themselves to some "Soviet" prototype which is no more a reality than a "Soviet" language is. Yet no one has proposed that the Great Russians should assimilate themselves to the same "Soviet" prototype and stop using the language of Pushkin and Tolstoy.

And yet the total assimilation of the Soviet Jews, while desired in theory, is made im-

possible in practice. Even if it were not written on his official card of identity, the Soviet Jew would remain aware that he was different. Contrary to the impression of many people, the Soviet Union is not at all a melting pot. In the last decades Soviet leadership has occupied itself very little with the relations of nationalities, on the assumption that these would somehow work themselves out without state intervention. But as far as the Jews of the USSR are concerned, an impasse has been reached. The younger generation of Soviet Jews accept it as a fact that they are different from Gentile Russians, and it is no mystic voice in their blood that says so, but Comrade Khrushchev himself.

IN RECENT months contacts between Jews in Russia and those in the "popular democracies" have increased. At one time in 1955 it looked as though the wartime Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in Moscow might be resurrected; a congress to protest against German rearmament (West German rearmament, to be sure) was held in Paris—but Soviet Jewry could not send delegates to even this party-controlled affair. Later, there were reports that official representatives of the Jewries of the satellite countries wanted to join the World Jewish Congress, but again Soviet Jewry was left out. Then when Nahum Goldman, president of the WJC, inquired about a reported official invitation to him to come to Moscow, it turned out that it had all been a misunderstanding: Dr. Goldman, or others of his organization, could visit Moscow if they wished, but only as private tourists. The sole official invitations were to the representatives of Jewish religious organizations.*

*The Communist Yiddish daily in New York, the *Morning Freiheit*, complained on September 16, 1956, that so far the synagogue still seems to be the only "Jewish address in the Soviet Union." The *Freiheit's* article in general was illuminating as to the depth and extent of the reaction of Jewish Communists to the recent revelations of anti-Semitism in the USSR. The *Freiheit* dared, as the *New York Times* put it a day later, "rebuke" the press chief of the Soviet Foreign Ministry for denouncing as "slandorous and anti-Soviet" the now famous account of the liquida-

Any increase of contacts with the Jewish communities of the Communist world is to be welcomed, but ambassadors of good will can do harm as well as good, and each should be equipped with a handbook containing basic information about the way in which the countries they intend visiting are ruled. This applies in particular to those visitors to the USSR who do not know Russian and have to rely on official interpreters in making direct contact with Russian Jews. Sometimes even those who do know the language get, or let themselves be, taken in.

A typical example of an attempt to "rescue" East European Jews from their isolation was that of Rabbi Kurt Wilhelm of Stockholm, who traveled to Rumania in February 1955, and told Bucharest reporters that he was "greatly impressed by the generous freedom under which every citizen of the Rumanian Peoples Republic can live and do his duty to himself and the Republic. As a Jew I wish to state my view that, for the first time, the Jew in Rumania has been emancipated. This freedom existed before, but only *de jure*, today it is *de facto*. I could see Jewish life, the Jewish spirit. . . . I have been impressed by working conditions in Rumania, and by the great will to peace everywhere." Rumania, according to Communists and non-Communists alike, happens to be the most backward of all the "popular democracies" as far as political freedom, living standards, the popularity of the regime, and the progress of de-Stalinization are concerned. Under these circumstances, such fulsome praise of the regime as Rabbi Wilhelm's only makes the visitor from abroad look foolish.

tion of Yiddish culture and its outstanding figures that appeared in the Communist Yiddish paper, *Folksshtimme*, in Warsaw last April. This article was the first to shake Jewish and other Communists in the West and convince them of the truth of the fact that anti-Semitism had been carried on officially in the Soviet Union. The *Freiheit* also protested at the lack of information about what was happening to the surviving Soviet Yiddish writers who are now being "rehabilitated," and at the fact that their persecution in the past had still not been given publicity inside the Soviet Union itself.

The stories of several other Jewish visitors returned from behind the Iron Curtain betray a naivety and an ignorance that are equally startling. Thus Mrs. Esther Seager, a justice of the peace and deputy mayor of Smethwick in England, could write in one of a series of reports by her featured in the *London Jewish Chronicle* (August 17, 1956):

I asked about the present position of Jewish writers and was told that many were now active. Asking for names, the people I met quoted Grossman, Imber, Svetlov, Granin, Marshack, Erenburg [sic], Ilya Selvinski, Antokolski, Boris Pasternak, and Margarita Aliger. Whether these write in the Yiddish idiom or on Jewish subjects I am not personally competent to judge, being a student neither of Russian or Yiddish literature, but possibly some of the names give some reassurance to those to whom the recent reports of the wrongful executions under Stalin gave so much pain. . . .

All these are names of well-known Soviet writers of Jewish origin who write neither in Yiddish nor on Jewish subjects; there had never been any doubt outside Russia that they were still alive. Was Mrs. Seager never told that what was really at issue in the execution of the Yiddish writers was the fact that they wrote in a tongue that belonged solely to Jews? And why should the survival of Ilya Ehrenburg (or Erenburg), one of Stalin's most vicious literary hatchetmen, reassure Jews elsewhere? Nevertheless, Mrs. Seager concludes her story with the observation, "Although they are better off, Soviet Jews fear that Stalinism may reappear. I was myself not entirely free from being watched when I made my contacts."

II

THE Kremlin's policy toward its Jewish subjects cannot be separated from its attitude to the Jewish communities outside the USSR. Certainly, one of the important motives behind the recent easing of anti-Jewish policy in the USSR is the wish to create a favorable impression among American and Western European Jews. Yet one of the probable reasons why the Soviet leaders have felt it necessary to go slow with these conces-

sions is the existence of Israel. Israel apparently exerts a great attraction on very many Jews in Russia, and one that the Soviet leaders view as highly undesirable. And though the plight of Soviet Jews has been somewhat relieved, the Soviet attitude toward Israel has become steadily more hostile in the last year.

The campaign against Israel started in the Soviet press when the Czechs made their arms deal with Egypt in the autumn of 1955. Since then Soviet support of the Arabs against Israel has become systematic and almost complete. At least once every two weeks the "bellicose ruling circles" of Israel are denounced for preparing to attack their peace-loving Arab neighbors in order to put pressure on them to join the Western "aggressive" bloc. Israel is called the real cause of the present tension in the Middle East, as though she were some Middle Eastern Formosa or South Korea—an "imperialist pawn being used to sabotage the struggle for freedom and independence of the progressive Arab governments." And so on. Nor has Soviet aid to the Arabs been confined to words and modern arms: real political support has been given them. In view of the avowed Arab intention to "wipe Israel out," Soviet intervention in the Middle East has now become a mortal danger to the young state.

What are the reasons for this turn on the part of Soviet foreign policy? Though the Soviet leaders have never been philo-Semites or pro-Zionist, it cannot be held that any issue of principle, or "ideology," lies behind their present hostility to Israel. Soviet leadership thinks in terms of power politics, not in those of lofty internationalism. At bottom its Middle Eastern policy is neither pro-Arab nor pro-Israel; it is pro-Soviet. If Israel had twenty million instead of only a million and a half inhabitants, the Soviets might be much friendlier toward her. This is the long and the short of it.

WHENEVER things go badly—and Israel's foreign policy has been going badly for quite a while—there is a strong temptation

to criticize people and policies instead of acknowledging circumstances and developments that could not possibly have been changed or averted. Yet there is more than a strong suspicion that the Israeli reaction, both official and unofficial, to the hostile trend of Soviet policy has been wrong for quite some time, and that a more realistic one would have brought about some improvement in Israel's position. The present tendency to let things drift is dangerous and, unless checked, may have fatal consequences.

Israeli foreign policy cannot change the fact that there are no more than a million and a half Jews in Israel, but it could have generated effective counterpressure against the Soviets' unqualified support of the Arabs. Even non-Jewish observers—like the members of the recent French Socialist delegation to Moscow—have gone on record as saying that unless Jews in the West succeeded in exerting counterpressure, Soviet support of the Arabs would become even stronger. And so, in effect, it has. It happens that Soviet leadership has become more concerned than ever to placate public opinion in the West, and liberal and left-wing opinion in particular, which is predominantly sympathetic to Israel. Israel could have made things difficult for Moscow simply by making the facts of Soviet policy toward Israel more widely known. This she has conspicuously failed to do.

Communists as well as Socialists in the West have been greatly disturbed by the crimes against Jews committed by and under Stalin, and they are equally troubled by present Soviet policy in the Middle East.

There may be no direct connection in motivation between Stalin's crimes and Moscow's present pro-Arab line, but Communists well know that "objectively" (a basic term for those trained in "dialectical" thinking) the second may have the same consequences as the first: the killing of Jews. The revelation of what happened to Soviet Jewry under Stalin has dealt a great shock to the Communist rank and file in the West—if not, perhaps, their leaders. And again,

criticism of Russian support of Nasser's semi-fascist regime against the all-socialist government of Israel has been expressed by Communists as well as Socialists.

Jean-Paul Sartre's *Temps Modernes*, a staunchly fellow-traveling magazine, and other French publications of the same hue, have run articles highly critical of Soviet Middle Eastern policy. *Libération*, a French daily the Communists put out for their sympathizers, called the Soviet proposal to exclude Israel from among the nations to be represented in the Suez conference "opportunistic." Pietro Nenni, a man with an unblemished pro-Soviet record up to this year, strongly denounced Nasser's aggressive policy and, by implication, Soviet support of him. A Communist reader of the London *Daily Worker*—to give an illustration of the mood of the rank and file—wrote to it: "Here in Stepney we do not share your admiration for General [sic] Nasser, here we are pro-Israel." And he asked the editor whether General Franco was next in line for a white-washing.*

ALL this would show that a large but untapped reservoir of good will for Israel exists among some Western Communists as well as others. But Israeli foreign policy has not tried to use this good will—or anything else that might compromise the Soviets. Perhaps one of the most spectacular opportunities missed in this regard was offered by an interview Khrushchev recently gave the cor-

respondent of a leading Egyptian newspaper, *Al Ahram*. The text as originally printed was worse than the excerpts published in the West, and quoted Khrushchev as saying that "I do not wish to form an opinion about the future of Israel because the West might use my words and call us warmongers." (We have to assume that these words are authentic, since TASS never hesitates to issue a denial when a Soviet leader has been misquoted.) It is easy to imagine how awkward it would have made things for the Soviet leaders had the text of this interview been given wide publicity in the West. There would have been immediate consequences—and they would have been advantageous to Israel.

The reasons for the Israeli failure to take advantage of chances like these to alert public opinion in the West are complicated. What is at issue is not so much a clearly conceived notion of Israeli-Soviet relations but a state of mind, official and unofficial.

To the extent that it finds coherent expression, the reasoning behind this state of mind goes as follows: Israel is a very small country and the Soviet Union is one of the two greatest powers in the world. By systematically criticizing Soviet policy in the Middle East, Israel would antagonize Moscow even more. In fact, Moscow has been offended ever since she protested against the Communist arms shipments to Egypt. The Israelis would be branded as "cold warmongers," "mad dogs of Wall Street," and so forth. Thus their freedom of action would become even more limited than it is now—and this at a time when American and British foreign policy is cool toward Israel and not concerned in the least whether or not she identifies herself with the West. In addition, there have been some straws in the wind tending to show that the Soviets are reconciled to the existence of Israel: after all, there was that declaration from the Kremlin last April in favor of peace between Israel and her Arab neighbors. A commercial agreement was reached under which the Russians now sell crude oil to Israel. (The Soviet press did not report this treaty for fear,

*There are some exceptions. Several prominent left-wing Labor politicians in Britain have come out in defense of Nasser. Maurice Orbach, a Labor M.P., told a London audience that he had established "a relationship of friendship and sincerity with Colonel Nasser. Nasser was my brother and I was his." This attitude has caused consternation among Jews and lifted eyebrows among non-Jews. Wrote the London *Sunday Express* in an article dated August 26, 1956, on "Britain's Nasserites": "What have Mr. Orbach, M.P. . . . Mr. Sidney Silverman, M.P., Mr. Ian Mikardo, M.P., and Mr. Frank Alaun, M.P., in common? All these men subscribe to the Jewish faith. All call themselves Zionists. . . . Colonel Nasser's overwhelming purpose is the utter destruction of the State of Israel. Is it therefore not fantastic that they should be supporting Nasser?"

Shepilov said, that undue political significance would be attributed to it.)

Some leading Soviet personalities—this line of reasoning continues—put in an appearance at the Israeli embassy in Moscow on Israel's independence day, and Mikoyan himself took Ambassador Avidar's daughter out on the lake in a rowboat at that famous garden party last summer. Besides all this, Western power and influence is decreasing steadily in the Middle East, while Soviet power is on the rise. Clearly, one cannot afford to offend Russia in these circumstances. As the Tel Aviv correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* put it on August 7: "The key is seen to rest in Russian hands. The decline of Western prestige engenders inevitably renewed gropings in Israel for some brand of neutralism as yet undiscovered. Disappointment with Washington and London is bound to lead Israel closer towards the Soviet orbit. . . ."

ALL the Israeli political parties, with the sole exception of the Communist—which is one of the least de-Stalinized Communist parties in the world—have strongly criticized Soviet Middle Eastern policy. Even Mapam and Ahdut Avoda, for all their devotion to the "world of progress," have complained bitterly about the hostile Soviet attitude, and expressed the opinion that the Russians "may yet come to regret their present opportunistic line." But neither Mapam nor Ahdut Avoda has yet given any good reason why the Russians will. For the rest, both parties remain convinced that the Kremlin's present line, though it may have fateful consequences for Israel, is merely an "aberration from the internationalist norm" that will sooner or later be recognized as such and revised.

These illusions are shared to some extent by many people outside these two parties, which is to be accounted for by a variety of factors. One is the well-established fact that Jews are incurable optimists: after all, Russia came out in favor of Israel in 1947-48—why shouldn't she do so again as the result of some unforeseen development? Another fac-

tor is the widespread feeling in Israel for Russia, Russian literature, and individual Russians. There is nothing surprising about this: many Jews of the generations that settled Israel contracted Russophilism before they left the Czar's dominions; nor can the importance of the great Russian novelists be disputed, or the amiability of the average Russian.

An unprecedented wave of excitement swept Israel when the Soviet and Israeli soccer teams played each other, first in Moscow and then at Ramat Gan this July, in the preliminary rounds of the Olympic games. A contest with no other nation could have caused that much enthusiasm—or so many editorials in the papers. There was nothing wrong in this enthusiasm, but the conclusions drawn from, and the political significance attributed to, these soccer matches were quite unwarranted.

Lastly, public opinion in Israel is not very well informed about Soviet policy or things Soviet in general. The fellow-traveling London *New Statesman* is the staple source of political enlightenment for countless non-Communist intellectuals in Israel as well as in many other countries east of Suez. The picture this weekly gives of Soviet activity and Soviet motivations may be very persuasive, but has little to do with reality, and the confusion it creates in the minds of uncritical readers—including some in official positions who ought to know better—only serves Moscow's ends.

Some of the fallacies that abound in Israeli political thinking go deep and cannot be discussed here. Others, like the proposed orientation toward an imaginary Asia, or the "gropings for some brand of neutralism as yet undiscovered," are superficial and should perhaps not have undue importance attributed to them: in difficult situations people tend to grasp at all sorts of crankish and illusory panaceas. Those Israelis, for example, who advocate a rapprochement with the Soviets have to realize that this means that Israel would have to survive, if at all, within her 1947 frontiers, and probably under even less favorable conditions. If

this is thought inevitable, then one would be well advised to return to the 1947 frontiers at once, and voluntarily, which would be preferable to accepting them later under overwhelming pressure. It is remarkable how this dilemma is suppressed by the advocates of a pro-Soviet orientation—out of shortsightedness, if no other reason. The Communists, for once, are more honest on this particular issue, and urge that Israel surrender to the Arab demands forthwith. Other political cogitators pretend to believe that the survival of Israel within her present frontiers can be combined somehow with the alignment of Israeli foreign policy in the same direction as that of the uncommitted or neutralist Asian countries.

WHAT is very true, however, is that Moscow has become the key to many of Israel's problems in the Middle East. Israel's cold-shouldering by Washington and London was largely motivated by the fear that Russia would outmaneuver the West for the sympathies of the Arab world. Washington and London cannot hope to compete with Moscow in its anti-Israeli policy but—so it seems to be believed in the West—they should still not fall too far behind Moscow in courting the Arabs lest the Arabs be propelled even further toward the Soviet side. An improvement in Israeli relations with the West can be expected, therefore, only if Washington and London are given no further reason to fear all-out Soviet support for the Arabs against Israel.

How can Moscow be prevailed upon to moderate its anti-Israeli stand? There are, theoretically at least, two possibilities. One would be a far-reaching rapprochement with Russia. But this is out of the question, even if no issues of principle were involved. Moscow is already too busy wooing the Arabs, and though the Russians may not have anything in principle against friendship with Israel, they know that they cannot have friendship both with her *and* the Arabs—

and that the Arabs are far more important.

The only other means of influencing the Russians is to bring all kinds of pressure, direct and indirect, to bear on them. Israel could call attention to how the Soviets violate their own professed standards of internationalism, socialism, and democracy by backing the Arab regimes against Israel. There is good reason to feel that such publicity would not be greatly liked in Moscow. This line of action might not be sufficient to bring about a basic change in Soviet Middle Eastern policy but, if vigorously pursued, it would at least compel the Kremlin to move more cautiously and take a less blatant anti-Israeli line. However, as I have said, no such line of action has been undertaken by Israel as yet. As a result, Soviet policy against her has become increasingly unrestrained—after all, what has Moscow got to fear from her?—while Israel's international position has continued to deteriorate.

Thus the "thaw" in the USSR has given Jews less cause to rejoice than most other people. The situation of Soviet Jews has improved inasmuch as their active persecution has halted. But they are still the victims of discrimination, the Jewish religion is still among the "least favored" in the Soviet Union, and the opposition to most expressions of Jewish national life continues. The few almanacs of Yiddish verse and prose that may be published in coming months, and the "evenings of Jewish humor," will be welcome. But what do they weigh against the jet planes and heavy tanks being supplied by Moscow to governments whose avowed intention is to wipe Israel out? The motives of Soviet policy may have changed since Stalin, and Soviet leadership may have little against the Jews and Israel per se, but it so happens that the Jews and Israel stand in the way of some important projects for the expansion of Soviet influence and power. The outcome, this time, unless something is done about it soon, may be more tragic than anything ever perpetrated by Stalin.